

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE **2-A**WASHINGTON TIMES
15 November 1985

State Dept. derides report of secret pact on defectors

By Rita McWilliams
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A theory raised by Sen. Jesse Helms and Ukrainian-Americans that the U.S. government has a secret agreement with the Soviet Union to return Soviet seamen who try to defect is "nonsense," according to State Department officials.

That "is a bunch of crap. It's utter nonsense ... It's really obscene," said James G. Hergen, the State Department's assistant legal adviser for consular affairs, who has been involved in the Miroslav Medvid case.

Mr. Medvid is the 25-year-old Ukrainian seaman who jumped into the Mississippi River Oct. 24 near New Orleans in an apparent attempt to defect. He was returned to ship "kicking and screaming" by the ship's American agents under orders from the Border Patrol.

An administration source said later that the United States was prepared to use force to take Mr. Medvid off the ship for further questioning. Soviets allowed Mr. Medvid to be taken from the ship, and he signed a statement that he wanted to return home and that he was worried about his parents, officials said.

The grain freighter Marshal Konev left U.S. waters last weekend with Mr. Medvid aboard. But many who have raised the issue of a "secret agreement" also question if the man interviewed by the State Department

was the man who jumped ship.

Fueling the speculation is a medical report by a Navy doctor that describes Mr. Medvid as "shortish, 150 pounds." Witnesses who helped Mr. Medvid on Oct. 24 described him as about 6 feet tall and weighing about 170 to 180 pounds.

State Department officials say Mr. Medvid was positively identified by a photo taken the night he jumped ship. They also said he was identified by his passport and by a birthmark on his foot.

"It's a very sad story," Mr. Hergen said. "We made superhuman efforts to give Medvid an opportunity to make a fair choice. Every person in the State Department had the utmost sympathy for the guy. We were all rooting for him."

Jessee Tabor, chief of the Border Patrol for the New Orleans region, said each case is usually "handled on its own merits." About 113 seamen have been put back on ships in the New Orleans area in the past year, he said.

Two other seamen, both Romanians, have successfully defected in the past two weeks. Paul Firica jumped ship near Houston, and Stevan Vernea jumped ship near Jacksonville.

Mr. Firica, 44, in a press conference in Houston, said he was worried when he heard about the Medvid incident. A translator for Mr. Firica said, "He thought they were going to send him back on the ship. If he would have been caught, the only alternative would have been suicide."